



Milwaukee County

Supervisor Joseph A. Rice, 6th District
Chairman, Code of Ethics Study Committee

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For Immediate Release
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REFORM OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY ETHICS CODE UNDERWAY

Recommendations to be presented to County Board of Supervisors next month

Milwaukee, WI – The Code of Ethics Study Committee, chaired by Milwaukee County Supervisor Joseph A. Rice, is completing a review and revision of Milwaukee County's Code of Ethics. The changes being considered by the Committee are designed to establish clear guidelines for standards of conduct to assist public officials and employees in avoiding actions that are incompatible with the best interest of County government. Ethical standards of conduct are intended to foster public trust and promote confidence in the integrity of Milwaukee County government.

"The Committee's recommendations are designed to instill public confidence in Milwaukee County Government by clarifying the expectations of behavior by public officials," Supervisor Rice said. "The focus has been an encouraging compliance through education and training combined with clear and fair regulations."

The Code of Ethics Study Committee was established in June 2006 to study the existing and proposed revisions of the Milwaukee County Code of Ethics, research comparable codes in other jurisdictions and report recommendations to the County Board of Supervisors. **The Committee will present its report and proposed changes at a public hearing on Wednesday, September 19, 2007 to be held at Marquette University Law School, Sensenbrenner Hall, Room 307, beginning at 6:00 PM. Distinguished Fellow in Law and Public Policy at Marquette University Law School Mike Gousha will facilitate the meeting.**

The Committee's recommendations include:

- **A new process to appoint members of the Milwaukee County Ethics Board** to help avoid any appearance of political influence, with new board members nominated by leaders of long-standing, broad-based civic, professional, and faith-based organizations in Milwaukee County.

- **Revising the new Code of Ethics to make it more readable and user-friendly** from both a professional and layperson's perspective. The new code's streamlined format will feature better subject headings and a clear table of contents.
- **Adopting a new protocol in cooperation with the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office**, to identify the process for suspected code violations, offering Milwaukee County municipalities additional guidance in processing ethics questions.
- **Clarifying code language to encourage those covered to seek guidance from the Ethics Board** on questions related to code compliance.
- **Adopting a new provision barring County officials from the use of County resources in pursuit of political activities** and identifying activities not to be undertaken while acting on-duty or in an official capacity.
- **Add language to encourage settlements of certain cases voluntarily.**
- **Urge county policy makers to properly inform those covered under the Code** by encouraging voluntary compliance and preventing unintentional violations due to lack of familiarity.
- **Ensure sufficient budgetary resources dedicated to administering the Code's provisions fairly and impartially.** Resources should be made available to the Ethics Board for managing education/outreach efforts and for event enforcement actions that require outside assistance or services.

Members of the Study Committee include Supervisor Joseph A. Rice, Mr. Robert Andrews, Mr. Rick Ceschin, Ms. Hannah Dugan, Mr. Charles C. Mulcahy, and Dr. Joan Prince.

"We've devoted a significant amount of time studying the current laws to recommend these changes," said Supervisor Rice added. "We're looking forward to presenting these changes to the Board and the public."

The guidelines are intended to apply to all elected County officials and certain other employees to provide guidance on avoiding the appearance of self-interest and personal benefit/gain. The Code also requires written disclosures by most elected officials, employees and appointees regarding private financial or personal interests in matters that may affect the County.

A grant from the Government Innovations Fund of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation allowed the Committee to obtain professional assistance from retired Marquette University Law School Professor Charles Clausen, who served as an ethics advisor.